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Letter dated 6 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of Kazakhstan in January 2018 (see annex).

The document was prepared by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, following consultations with other members of the Security Council.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kairat **Umarov**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Kazakhstan
to the United Nations

18-12929 (E) 170818

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Annex to the letter dated 6 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of Kazakhstan (January 2018)

Introduction

Under the presidency of Kazakhstan in January 2018, the Security Council held 21 public meetings, including one high-level thematic briefing, one ministerial-level debate and one open debate, as well as one private meeting and 11 consultations of the whole. The Council adopted two resolutions and agreed on four presidential statements and 12 statements to the press. A Security Council mission to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was organized.

In accordance with the Organization's practice, Kazakhstan began its presidency with the presentation of the provisional programme of work of the Council for the month, which was adopted at the Council's consultations of the whole on 2 January.

Africa

Darfur

On 10 January, the Council held a briefing, followed by closed consultations, on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, presented the joint assessment by the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission of phase one of the mission's reconfiguration, and outlined recent developments in Darfur in the context of the latest 60-day report of the Secretary-General on UNAMID (S/2017/1113).

Introducing the main findings of the assessment, the Under-Secretary-General noted that the Government of the Sudan was firmly consolidating its control and State authority across Darfur, except for pockets in the Jebel Marra area, which were controlled by a weakened Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid. He reported that phase one of the reconfiguration of UNAMID was completed before the deadline of 31 December, and that 11 team sites had been closed and handed over to the Darfur State governments. No tangible progress was noted in the Darfur political process or in the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. As the hybrid operation moved towards implementing phase two, he recommended that a new mission concept with adjusted priorities be considered at the renewal of the UNAMID mandate in June.

Council members positively noted the significant drop in the number of clashes between the Government and armed movements, and supported a recommendation for a review that would consider a new mission concept, reflecting the situation on the ground. Several speakers stressed that an improved security environment would help both the State and UNAMID to focus on development and move towards fulfilling the Doha Agreement, and called for the creation of necessary conditions for the return of internally displaced persons and for supporting the Government's weapons-collection programme.

On 31 January, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/4) on Darfur, in which it welcomed improvements in the security and humanitarian situations in Darfur but remained concerned about outstanding challenges. It also

expressed its support for a review that would consider a new mission concept for UNAMID. It reiterated support for the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur as a viable framework for the peace process and welcomed the signing of an African Union High-level Implementation Panel road map by the Government and the armed movements, and urged them to make immediate progress in implementing the Doha recommendations.

South Sudan

On 24 January, the Council held a briefing on the situation in South Sudan. The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's 30-day report. The Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Festus Mogae, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller, also provided briefings from their respective perspectives.

The Under-Secretary-General welcomed the signing on 21 December of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access between the South Sudanese parties. But the security situation remained of concern, and there continued to be numerous violations of the Agreement by parties in different parts of the country. This illustrated a lack of genuine commitment to honour their word and brought the need for compliance to the forefront.

The Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission emphasized that the recent Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) revitalization forum had been a success and resulted in an agreement that had had a generally positive effect in reducing the level of violence in the country. He informed the Council that the Agreement had been violated by signatory parties, and that the number of alleged violations were under investigation.

The Assistant Secretary-General said that, under the recently launched response plan for South Sudan, humanitarian partners sought to assist 6 million people, more than half the country's population. She remained concerned about the high level of abuses and violations perpetrated against aid workers and civilians, mainly women and children, and that, despite the order issued by the President of South Sudan in November 2017, humanitarian access remained unpredictable.

The Council members believed that the unity between the United Nations, the African Union and IGAD would be necessary to bring about positive and sustained change in South Sudan. They called upon international partners to support the IGAD-led revitalization process, which would be the most effective platform to confront and resolve the severe security, economic and humanitarian crises that continued to overwhelm South Sudan.

Somalia

On 24 January, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in that country, Michael Keating, and the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Francisco Caetano José Madeira, informed the Council of the progress made by the new federal authorities in Somalia with the assistance of the international community.

Despite the existing difficulties, the national agenda had been developed, envisaging financial reforms, accelerated job creation, people's participation in the political process, conflict resolution and security sector reform. In addition, significant progress had been made in political reform and the establishment of

relations between the Government of Somalia and local authorities, and in mitigating the difficult humanitarian situation.

It was specifically noted that the Al-Shabaab terrorist group continued to pose a direct threat to peace and security in Somalia and continued to threaten the peacebuilding and statehood processes in the country. At the same time, Somalis were faced with numerous complex political and humanitarian problems, with serious security challenges. The speakers stressed the positive role of AMISOM, the national security forces and international partners in Somalia, which were contributing to progress in the country.

The members of the Council unanimously welcomed the progress in reforms in security policy and in the economic and political sectors in Somalia. They urged the federal Government to ensure high-level dialogue with constituent entities on key issues, such as a thorough constitutional review, elections, fiscal federalism, and the distribution of power and resources.

The Council reaffirmed the importance of accelerated implementation of the national security architecture and the consequent transfer of responsibility from AMISOM to the national security forces of the country. They expressed concern about the continuing vulnerability of millions of people, especially children and internally displaced persons, due to the constant threat of famine in Somalia, and recognized the critical need for considerable support for the humanitarian response plan.

United Nations Office for West Africa and Sahel

On 11 January, the Council held a briefing on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNOWAS, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, introduced the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Office (S/2017/1104).

The Special Representative highlighted that, despite the progress in West Africa and the Sahel, especially as seen in the democratic and peaceful political transitions in Liberia and other countries, the security situation was fragile and of grave concern. Terrorists groups had launched several complex attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Following a notable decline in the attacks by Boko Haram in the first half of 2017, there had been an escalated number of incidents, and particularly a fivefold increase in the use of children as suicide bombers. He stressed that those actions were causing humanitarian crises in the Lake Chad basin, where more than 2 million displaced people were still desperately awaiting an end to the conflict.

He also noted the significant progress in operationalizing the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger) and reinvigorating the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

The Council members expressed concern about the prevalence of threats stemming from terrorism and violent extremism, which were linked to the problems of transboundary organized crime, trafficking in migrants, drugs, weapons and human beings, which are further escalated by poverty and widespread unemployment, particularly among the youth. The situation in Togo must be given due attention, despite the welcome regional efforts to identify a way forward through dialogue.

On 30 January, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/3), in which it welcomed positive developments in several West African countries, but also expressed serious concern over the challenging security situation in the region and the Sahel. The Council members also reiterated their concern over the situation in Guinea-Bissau, calling upon its political leaders to complete implementing the Conakry Agreement without further delay. In the statement, Council members commended the leadership shown by countries in West Africa and the Sahel, and the

efforts of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Member States in the region to strengthen border security and regional cooperation.

Mali

On 23 January, the Council held a briefing on the situation in Mali. The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, presenting the Secretary-General's latest report on the situation (S/2017/1105), noted the worsening humanitarian situation and growing insecurity in the north and centre of the country. Those tensions were claiming the lives of civilians, Malian defence and security forces, and peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The goal now for the Government should be to create conditions conducive for elections and move forward in implementing two key parts of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, namely, decentralization and security sector reform. These should be accomplished in a concerted and inclusive manner, with the support of MINUSMA. The Under-Secretary-General commended the adoption, just a few days previously, of a timeline to implement the Agreement, and called for all parties to respect that schedule. He also encouraged the parties to develop a road map leading to new Malian defence and security institutions. He welcomed the progress made operationalizing the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, and the stepping up of efforts and launching of four projects in the Mopti and Ségou regions by the Peacebuilding Fund and development partners.

Five years after its establishment, it was time to reassess the assumptions underpinning the MINUSMA presence in Mali and review its key mandated tasks and structural layout. He also stressed that the Secretariat was working with MINUSMA to implement the recommendations of a recent report on peacekeeper fatalities.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, reaffirmed the determination of his country's President to speed up implementation of the Agreement, saying there was no other option for resolving the nation's crisis. He acknowledged, however, that repeated attacks in the north and centre of Mali were undermining efforts by the State to assert its authority. He reiterated his Government's call for the operational capacities of MINUSMA to be strengthened, while at the regional level he welcomed progress in the operationalization of the Joint Force, as well as the Council's support for that entity.

The Council members expressed their concern about the worsening security situation in central Mali. They emphasized the urgency of implementing the Agreement as elections drew closer, and for the capacities of MINUSMA to be strengthened amid a deteriorating security environment. The representative of France underscored the Council's responsibility to encourage the parties to fulfil their commitments.

Following the briefing, on 24 January, the Council issued a statement to the press on Mali.

Liberia

On 8 January, the Council issued a statement to the press on the elections in Liberia, in which it congratulated the Liberian people for the peaceful conduct of the presidential run-off elections held on 26 December 2017. It commended the National Elections Commission and the Government of Liberia for their preparation and execution of the elections. In that statement, the Council members expressed appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Farid Zarif, and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for their continued assistance and use of good offices, and to ECOWAS, the African Union and all international, regional

and national election observation missions for ensuring the transparency of the electoral process and timely assessments. The importance of the upcoming political transition was noted and the Council commended active engagement between the outgoing and incoming Administrations, urged close coordination between the incoming Government and the United Nations, in the light of the closure of UNMIL, and encouraged the continuing engagement of the international community and donors to assist the continuing efforts of Liberia to achieve sustainable peace.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 9 January, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations briefed the members of the Council, who reiterated their concern at the current political, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the challenges faced in implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016. The current threats were aggravated by the deteriorating security situation, in particular in the Kasaï region and the east of the country, as well as by the abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. These had serious subsequent humanitarian consequences, disproportionately affecting women and children, thus necessitating greater attention to the humanitarian situation.

The Council members called upon all parties to remain calm and refrain from violence of any kind, and reiterated their commitment to act firmly against all Congolese actors whose actions and statements impeded peace and the elections.

Support was expressed for the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union and regional organizations to ensure full implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016, in accordance with resolution 2348 (2017). A call was made on partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue to support genuine efforts by national stakeholders for implementing the agreement and to uphold peaceful and democratic presidential and legislative elections, which represented a viable road map towards peace and stability.

The Council members welcomed the steps taken by the National Electoral Commission towards finalizing voter registration in cooperation with MONUSCO. They welcomed the offer by the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Southern Africa Development Community and the European Union, along with the United Nations, to establish a coordinated electoral team of experts, ensuring at the same time the full and equal participation of women and youth.

Libya

On 17 January, the Council heard briefings on the situation in Libya from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, Ghassan Salamé; the Acting Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) and Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden, Irina Schoulgin Nyoni; and the co-founder of the non-governmental organization Together We Build It, Hajer Sharief.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General informed the Council that the second anniversary of the Libyan Political Agreement on 17 December 2017 passed peacefully. This was in no small part made possible by the unity of the Security Council, which in its recent presidential statement had declared its stand behind the Agreement, and not accepted any attempts to undermine it.

The spectre of violence remained present, however, as clashes occurred between forces affiliated to two rival communities. The political crisis in Libya had been accompanied by an equally severe humanitarian crisis. The United Nations would launch a humanitarian response plan, with special attention to the dire situation many migrants in Libya continued to face.

The Special Representative underlined that the work of the Mission focused on supporting efforts to adopt a new constitution, achieve national reconciliation and hold elections. The United Nations had successfully facilitated numerous dialogues between representatives of local communities formerly in conflict, while seeking to include major players and groups previously marginalized in political processes. During the visit to Libya of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, from 9 to 12 January, he had urged Libyan interlocutors to truly commit themselves to working together and implement the action plan to end the transition period.

The Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden gave a briefing on the work of the sanctions Committee during the period from 17 November 2017 to 17 January 2018, which was commended by the Council.

The Council members reiterated their full support for the action plan for the resumption of an inclusive Libyan-owned political process and for the leadership of the Special Representative in that process. They strongly urged all Libyans to redouble their efforts to engage urgently and constructively in the dialogue process in a spirit of compromise to secure a more inclusive political platform. It was reiterated that the Libyan Political Agreement remained the only viable framework to end the Libyan political crisis and that implementing it remained a key to holding elections and finalizing the political transition.

Americas

Colombia

On 10 January, the Council held a briefing and closed consultations on the situation in Colombia. The Council heard a briefing from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Jean Arnault. A statement was also made by the Vice-President of Colombia, Oscar Naranjo.

The Special Representative presented the first quarterly report (S/2017/1117) on the activities of the Mission, underlining the commitment of the Government and the leadership of the rebel group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to move forward with the peace process. He reported that political reintegration of the former guerrilla organization was on course, and the parliamentary and presidential election, to be held in 2018, and the local and departmental elections, to be held in less than two years, would be an opportunity for the new FARC (People's Alternative Revolutionary Force) party to gain seats.

The Mission continued to monitor with concern the socioeconomic reintegration of the 14,000 former combatants, especially when many of them were still in prison and extremely frustrated with the reintegration process. Diligent and thorough support of United Nations agencies and the international community was needed in reintegrating former combatants and developing communities in which ex-combatants were located, and it was announced that the Secretary-General would be visiting Colombia very shortly to review at first hand the peacebuilding efforts.

Regarding a temporary ceasefire between the Government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Special Representative informed the Council that the

temporary ceasefire had ended without a new agreement. It was unfortunate that attacks on the oil pipelines by ELN had resumed hours after the ceasefire deadline expired.

The Vice-President of Colombia thanked the United Nations and the Security Council for effective support and dedication to peacebuilding efforts in Colombia through the Mission. He reaffirmed the resolve and full commitment of the Government of Colombia to comply with the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict.

The Council members reiterated their full support for the peace process in Colombia and expressed appreciation for the work of the Special Representative and the Mission.

After the meeting, the Council issued a statement to the press, in which it expressed the hope that the Government and ELN would resume work on renewing and strengthening the ceasefire, and welcomed the visit of the Secretary-General to Colombia in support of the peace Agreement.

Asia

Security Council mission to Afghanistan

The Council undertook a visit to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan from 12 to 15 January. The first Council visit to Afghanistan since 2010, it was an opportunity to reiterate the Council's support for the Government and people of Afghanistan in their efforts to restore peace, stability and progress to the country.

In his briefing on 17 January, the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, Kairat Umarov, said that the Security Council's visiting mission to Afghanistan in January 2018 had clearly indicated that it would take more than a military solution to end the conflict in that country.

He noted that, during the visit to Kabul, the delegation met with the President and the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, together with other senior Afghan officials, including the National Security Adviser, the Chairman of the High Peace Council, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, the Interior, Agriculture, Economy, Energy and Water, and Trade and Commerce, among others. They also met with members of the Parliament, women's non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, representatives of political parties and the electoral management bodies, together with the leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the NATO Resolute Support Mission.

The mission, which was the first since 2010, provided insights into the country's needs and priorities, and was an opportunity to show solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan. It was important for the Council to reiterate its support for their continued efforts to establish peace, stability and progress in Afghanistan.

The first observation was that persisting insecurity continued to be the main obstacle to stabilization efforts as the security situation remained highly volatile. The mission noted with concern the increasing number of casualties as terrorist groups, including newcomers, were resorting to increasingly violent tactics. One worrying trend was the presence and activity of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) in the eastern and northern parts of the country. The terrorist groups had intensified attacks on Shia populations and their places of worship, exposing the potential for deepening sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country.

These tensions were aggravated by the challenges posed by the return of foreign terrorist fighters from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic who were regrouping in

Afghanistan. There were concerns about the potential use of the territory of Afghanistan to destabilize countries of the region. In that regard, interlocutors from the Government of Afghanistan stressed the need to increase regional cooperation in fighting and preventing terrorism and countering the movement of foreign terrorist fighters.

Also stressed were the links between violent extremism, well-organized transnational terrorist groups and criminal networks related to drug production and trafficking and the exploitation of natural resources. The Government of Afghanistan reiterated its readiness to engage constructively with neighbouring countries to address the issues of safe havens and curbing terrorism and to negotiate.

In this vision, economic development and greater regional cooperation were important factors in achieving security in Afghanistan. President Ghani emphasized his country's assets in its geographical location, human capital and national resources, which could facilitate the integration of Afghanistan into regional processes. In turn, regional initiatives would contribute to long-term stability in Afghanistan. Cabinet members spoke about the potential of several projects, ranging from the One Belt, One Road Initiative to the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, as well as plans for a fibre-optics corridor to China.

Strong cooperation among neighbours is critical to promote stability and prosperity in and around Afghanistan. This is the model of economic integration and stabilization that any subregion can use for the prevention of conflicts and the restoration of peace.

Members of the Council highly esteemed the efforts of Astana in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. They acknowledged the importance of the first visit of the Council to Afghanistan since 2010, whereby members of the Council had obtained first-hand information on the real situation in the country. The visit contributed to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the current dynamics of development in Afghanistan and the need to provide assistance to Kabul. This would be through expanding regional ties, including with the Central Asian States, to strengthen the connection between security and development issues, and finally to promote the principle of one United Nations in addressing the problems of this long-suffering country.

Ministerial debate on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development

On 19 January, the Council, under the presidency of Kazakhstan, held a ministerial-level debate on the theme "Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development". It was attended by the Secretary-General and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Central Asian States and the Russian Federation. The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan also took part in the event.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, in his statement, recalled the policy address of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, entitled "The conceptual vision of Kazakhstan to strengthen global partnership for building a safe, just and prosperous world", which he had presented on the occasion of Kazakhstan's taking its seat on the Security Council in January 2017. Two key elements of the seven priority directions of the President's vision were: turning Central Asia and Afghanistan into a model zone of peace, cooperation and security; and the commitment of Kazakhstan to long-term stability and sustainable peace by promoting the concept of the interdependence of security and development.

The results of the ministerial debate demonstrated the readiness of the regional countries, including those of Central Asia, to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan by extending further interactions and implementing specific regional projects in the fields of transit transport, infrastructure, trade, economic development, investment and energy. The delegations stressed that Afghanistan should be considered not as a threat, but as an important and promising partner with great untapped potential.

Following the debate, a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) was unanimously approved by all the Council members. In it the Council called on the international community to support Afghanistan through the expansion of regional cooperation and more efficient use of the tools of preventive diplomacy. Such an approach is aimed at creating a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity in the region, to serve as a model for replication, with suitable modifications, in other regions.

United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia

On 22 January, the Council held closed consultations to hear a presentation on the activity of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia given by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Regional Centre, Natalia Gherman. In her first briefing to the Council since her appointment in September 2017, the Special Representative underscored the positive dynamics and progress in the region, as shown by high-level visits of leaders of Central Asian countries, together with similar high-level meetings that led to greater understanding and stronger collaboration between the countries of the region. The Special Representative stressed that the States of Central Asia could take advantage of the current desire expressed for resolving the issues of cross-border water resources management, energy resources, cross-border procedures and environmental problems.

The Head of the Centre reported on the results of the conference on security and sustainable development, held on 10 and 11 November 2017 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, as well as the ministerial meeting of Central Asian States held on 11 December 2017 in Ashgabat. While the final communique adopted at Samarkand supported a new format of cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan, in Ashgabat the countries approved the work plan of the Centre for 2018–2020. She added that the Centre facilitates the organization of capacity-building training in the area of transboundary water management, and supports activities within the framework of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. In this context, she appealed to potential donors to support these initiatives.

The Special Representative also informed the Council about the Centre's robust action in countering terrorism, in particular the work on launching the third phase of the Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. The third phase of the Plan will include new aspects, such as combating foreign terrorist fighters and ensuring youth employment, which ultimately will reduce radicalization and the spread of terrorist ideology. The Special Representative reported about the plans to conduct a study on the radicalization of various populations in Central Asia.

The Special Representative concluded by assessing with appreciation the efforts of the Central Asian countries in supporting the integration of Afghanistan into regional and global processes. She emphasized the link between security and development, and the importance of a regional approach in resolving regional issues, as proposed by Kazakhstan.

The Council members unanimously expressed full support for the work of the Centre, which had marked its tenth anniversary in December 2017. There was

appreciation for the Centre's efforts to promote mechanisms for conflict prevention to ensure peace and security in the region. They also assessed highly the Centre's role in regional counter-terrorism activities, by supporting the Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. The Council members also underlined the important contribution of Kazakhstan, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, to promote mechanisms for conflict prevention to ensure peace and security, give better understanding of Afghanistan by organizing the Council mission to Kabul in January 2018, as well as organizing the ministerial debate on building regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

It was acknowledged that developments in Afghanistan, where increased terrorist activity was observed, affected the stability and security of the Central Asian region, and that this was a realistic and relevant concern for the Central Asian States. The ongoing efforts of the Centre to assist the Central Asian States in transboundary water management were commended, with an encouragement to all Central Asian States to play a full and active role in that process. The Centre's commitment to coordinate more effectively with UNAMA, and with the United Nations, in this regard was highly welcomed.

The members of the Council agreed on a statement to the press, issued on 25 January, which was the first on the Centre in the past three years.

Europe

Cyprus

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), Elizabeth Spehar, briefed the representatives of troop- and police-contributing countries at a private meeting on 16 January.

On 17 January, during closed consultations on the situation in Cyprus, the Special Representative highlighted developments since the active negotiations of the Secretary-General, the European Union and the guarantor States on the reunification of Cyprus in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, in July 2017, where the two sides — Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities — had decided to remain in a period of reflection.

Members of the Council expressed hope that, despite this outcome of the negotiations, the parties would remain committed to continuing the dialogue, following the presidential elections in Cyprus on 28 January 2018. They also confirmed that any arrangement regarding the security situation of Cyprus should be sought by respecting and applying the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Special focus must be paid to the situation in the buffer zone to eliminate tensions.

A number of difficult issues, such as the lack of intercommunity trust, missing persons and cultural issues, still needed urgent attention.

On 30 January, at its 8168th meeting, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2398 (2018), by which it renewed the mandate of UNFICYP.

The Council considered three reports of the Secretary-General: on his mission of good offices in Cyprus (S/2017/814, dated 28 September 2017); on the strategic review of UNFICYP (S/2017/1008, dated 28 November 2017); and on the United Nations operation in Cyprus (S/2018/25, dated 9 January 2018). Following a series of consultations on the draft resolution held earlier, the Council members decided to extend the mandate of the Force.

Currently, UNFICYP remains an important mechanism to maintain stability, ensure further continuation of political dialogue and elaborate on a gradual basis the final peaceful settlement of the problem.

Middle East

The situation in the Middle East/Islamic Republic of Iran

On 5 January, the Council, at the request of the delegation of the United States of America, held an open briefing, preceded by closed consultations at the request of the Russian Federation, to hear the report of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, on developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Several delegations said that they were viewing those events as worrisome in terms of violations of human rights and underlined the importance of the use of preventive diplomacy. Several also expressed their continuing support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Some expressed doubts about the expediency and legitimacy of convening a meeting of the Security Council on the intended topic, and some called it an interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign State.

The situation in the Middle East/Syrian Arab Republic

On 9 January, the Council held closed consultations and was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, on the fifty-first monthly report of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (S/2017/1119) on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The Council members took note of the latest developments and the current activities of OPCW. They emphasized the importance of resolving all outstanding issues related to the Syrian declaration. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to continue to prevent the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

On 23 January, the Council held a briefing to discuss the Syrian chemical dossier, especially the alleged chemical weapons attack on 22 January in eastern Ghutah in the Syrian Arab Republic. In this regard, the Council members urged unity in order to look towards the creation of a new, depoliticized and impartial structure to replace the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. During the meeting, the delegation of the Russian Federation circulated for subsequent consideration a draft resolution to establish a new investigation mechanism to replace the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which expired in November 2017.

On 30 January, the Council held a briefing and closed consultations during which it was briefed by the Assistant Secretary-General for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

During the open briefing, the Assistant Secretary-General warned that 13.1 million people were in need of protection and humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic. She claimed that during the past month no convoy had been able to get to the besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

She urged that supplies continue to be based on humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. The Governor of Hasakah had refused to allow humanitarian convoys to the hard-to-reach areas, claiming they were "uninhabited". In addition, the United Nations had suspended cross-border shipments at two authorized border points in Turkey because of rocket attacks from within the Syrian Arab Republic.

The intensification of hostilities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic had led to an increase in the number of civilian casualties. The escalation of hostilities had

extremely devastating consequences for civilians throughout the country. The recent waves of violence in Idlib, eastern Ghutah, rural Damascus, Damascus itself, Hama and Aleppo had reportedly caused the death and injury of hundreds of civilians, including women and children. The Assistant Secretary-General also reiterated her concern about the protection situation in Raqqah, and called on the parties to ensure the protection of civilians. The parties to the Syrian conflict were also called upon to provide unlimited humanitarian access to people in need of food and medical care.

During the consultations, Council members expressed their concern over the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, including in eastern Ghutah, and one Council member specifically raised concerns over the humanitarian situation in Raqqah. They discussed ways to improve mechanisms for providing assistance and called for greater support for the efforts of the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, including considering the five key requests made by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock. They noted that the dialogue between the United Nations humanitarian agencies and the Syrian Government should be sustained, and in the future such visits should be held on a regular basis. Members of the Council demanded that the parties to the conflict provide urgent humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach cities and villages, and also allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to carry out medical evacuation of seriously injured persons. They also considered it necessary to send a United Nations needs assessment mission without delay to the problematic areas of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

On 25 January, the Council held an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nikolay Mladenov, updated the Council on recent developments concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Special Coordinator urged the international community to bring back Palestinian and Israeli leaders to the negotiating table. He noted that it was time to show political will and remove all obstacles to a viable solution. He stressed that, although recent events had aggravated the situation in the region, lack of the desire to resume negotiations and the tendency to take unilateral decisions were not a new phenomenon. He expressed the opinion that the "paralysis" of the peace process had resulted in the deterioration of the security situation, violence and the expansion of illegal settlements.

The Special Coordinator further expressed support to the ongoing reconciliation process, following the Cairo Agreement signed by Fatah and Hamas on 12 October 2017 thanks to the Egyptian mediation. He expressed hopes that this political process would help to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Regarding the Israeli settlement policy, he reiterated that it is illegal under international law and undermines peace efforts, and deplored recent decisions announced by Israeli authorities. The representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine made statements.

Representatives of more than 74 States Members of the United Nations, including Council members, made statements. Many Member States expressed their commitment to the two-State solution, their worries regarding the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, their hope that the Cairo Agreement will lead to genuine Palestinian unity in line with internationally agreed principles, and their serious concern over the continuing settlement policy of Israel.

Thematic issues

Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

On 18 January, the Council held a high-level thematic briefing on the theme "Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction: confidence-building measures". The main objective of this event, initiated by the Kazakh presidency, was to seek long-lasting political solutions for protracted regional conflicts that may entail the threat or the actual use of weapons of mass destruction, and corresponding risks related to them.

The Secretary-General attended the briefing and made a statement, as did the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. The event was marked by high-level participation with eminent dignitaries from Poland (President, Andrzej Duda), Kuwait (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Sabah al-Sabah), the Russian Federation (Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov), United States of America (Nikki Haley as a member of President Trump's Cabinet) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field).

The Secretary-General drew attention to the need for developing effective measures to strengthen confidence and transparency in the field of non-proliferation and for enhancing the role of preventive diplomacy as a pledge of lasting global peace and stability. He also stressed the critical importance of verifiable disarmament and non-proliferation efforts in cases involving weapons of mass destruction.

The Secretary-General stressed that, despite the Council's efforts, global anxieties about nuclear weapons were the highest since the cold war. He said he was concerned that the existing arms reduction measures were under threat, pointing out especially the diminished confidence between the United States and the Russian Federation on nuclear and other issues.

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also expressed his belief that the United Nations can play a central role in assisting its Member States to develop, augment and support confidence-building measures and that its position as an honest broker allows it to serve as a platform for all parties to engage in an inclusive dialogue.

President Nazarbayev highlighted the key issues on the international agenda in the field of non-proliferation, calling on Member States to strengthen confidence-building measures and find compromise among the members of the Security Council to resolve existing conflicts and thus build a safer world. He stressed that one of the most important priorities of his country in the Security Council was to eliminate the threat of a global war and to settle local conflicts, which was previously reflected in his landmark document, entitled "Manifesto: the world, the twenty-first century", and his policy address of January 2017 when Kazakhstan assumed its seat on the Council.

President Nazarbayev expressed his great concern that the current legal framework for ensuring nuclear security might not prevent the expansion of the so-called "nuclear club". He therefore suggested a rethinking of the existing non-proliferation regime, based on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and that therefore new multilateral political decisions might be required.

Without questioning the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the President proposed that withdrawal from the Treaty should be made more difficult and complex because the example of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea might prompt others to possess nuclear weapons as well. He saw the rationale for drafting a special resolution of the Security Council that would define the consequences, including sanctions and enforcement measures for violators of the Treaty. Moreover, a mechanism for

applying tougher measures to prevent the acquisition and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction should be worked out, and adopted through separate Council resolutions. He also suggested that countries that had voluntarily renounced their nuclear weapons should receive firm guarantees from nuclear States.

Stressing that confidence-building measures should be a top priority on the global agenda, he underscored the need to stop dividing countries into military blocs. He further suggested stipulating a deadline for solving the lack of mutual confidence and global denuclearization by the centenary of the United Nations in 2045.

In conclusion, President Nazarbayev underlined that these initiatives and the issue of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction depend on mutual understanding and trust between nuclear Powers, and he praised the role and the historic mission of the Security Council towards this end.

The Council members underscored the importance of preventing conflicts through dialogue and strengthening confidence-building measures. Delegations presented their vision and recommendations for overcoming many specific national, regional and thematic issues, which for many reasons had remained unresolved, owing primarily to the lack of an appropriate atmosphere of trust and confidence. The meeting was most significant in pointing the way to various forms of confidence-building measures that could be adopted to defuse tensions and crises.

Maintenance of international peace and security: conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace

On 18 January, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/1) focused on conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the regional context. Council members expressed concern over the growing number of conflicts in different geographic areas all over the globe, and underlined the urgent need for redoubled efforts for their prevention and resolution, with specific emphasis on regional diplomacy and arrangements. They noted the importance of continuing to strive towards sustainable peace and achieving a world free of violent conflicts by the centenary of the United Nations.

The Council recalled that a comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy should include, inter alia, early warning, preventive deployment, mediation, peacekeeping, non-proliferation, accountability measures, as well as post-conflict peacebuilding, and recognized that those components were interdependent, complementary and non-sequential. The Council underscored the importance of peacebuilding and emphasized the need for engaging and collaborating with regional actors in policy related and country-specific issues in the context of advice given by the Peacebuilding Commission.

Reiterating that United Nations cooperation with regional and subregional organizations is critical to contributing to the prevention of the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, the Council recognized that development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and emphasized the importance of a revamped regional approach and strengthening coordination within the United Nations to increase the effectiveness of assistance provided on the ground and ensure greater transparency.

The Council encouraged periodic updates by the Secretary-General to the Council on the status of conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy efforts.